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AUTHOR Urgacz, Barbara
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ABSTRACT

In view of the 1973 changes brought about by the State's attempt to bring its authority closer to society and create new arrangements to satisfy rural needs, Poland's rural communities were analyzed in terms of a typology of social action. Defined as action and the desire to act resulting from membership in the local community, social action was identified via essential types derived from the need for: life necessities; emotional ties; and social affirmation. In Polish rural areas, there was evidence of an evolutionary trend indicating changing cultural values; wherein, man was being understood in terms of an intellectual rather than an emotional personality; the direct aspect of folk culture was being replaced by more indirect influences; Polish rural areas were entering the development stage of "shaping up life quality"; individual social activity was being influenced by social status; social activity was being influenced by both the physical and attitudinal aspects of the current modernization process. Operative at the awareness, acceptance, and cultural objectivization levels, innovative social action was performing the function of social control via selectivity, a phenomenon making social action leaders vital to the total rural-cultural picture and making human personality, as manifest in social activity, the most essential aspect of the principle of social action as a means to cultural change. (JC)

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Barbara Urgacz
Polish Academy of Sciences
Institute of Rural and
Agricultural Development

Social activity of rural local community as a sociological phenomenon

Definition of the phenomenon. What I call social activity is the action and the wish to act of an individual as a result of the fact of his membership in a local community. Understood as social energy, it is both the energy manifested by concrete operations and that potential one which, under favourable circumstances, may turn into action.

Therefore, by the term of social activity I will cover a wide range of co-operation phenomena, which make the system of mutual social security of rural inhabitants. It includes the neighbourly help in the field and household works, performing the last offices for the deceased, activity in Social Conciliatory Commissions, the task of which is self-management of social co-existence in local communities. Thus, there is involwed both the individual, casual agreement aiming at carrying out definite operations for private use, and permanent forms of activity, which have a status of a formal institution, and cover by their operations entire local communities of villages or even rural districts. All these forms of activity have the same feature in common namely, an attempt of the individual to go beyond his own family, to the forum of local community, to meet his requirements.

Theoretical and practical justification of the need for studies on social activity of present-day rural areas in Poland.

With the relative reducing of man's dependence on nature, the inter-relation of people is growing, and thus, the independence of the individual becomes ever more social. This essential social process, which has been frequently investigated by ethnologists in respect to aboriginal communities and traditional folk cultures, has not similarly involved sociologists of present-day rural areas. This formed a gap in our knowledge on the development of society, social culture and on the system of social life in rural areas.

Self-management activities of Polish rural inhabitants have a long-standing tradition of many centuries. Under the circumstances of a socialist system this self-management found particular appreciation and support. In the long-run prospects there is assumed a considerable share of the society in co-deciding on rural affairs. Now already there are being carried out experiments of social activation of local environments - the known two subsequent experiments of Nowy Sącz. These experiments provide data calling for scientific analysis, in order to explain the meaning of the defined results, and to find what theoretical and practical conclusions they offer for nowadays and for the future.

The setting up in 1973 of community administrative units, which aims at administration improvement and at bringing state authority closer to the society, means in practice

creating of new structures of administration as well as shaping of new arrangements and possibilities for satisfying the needs of rural population. Consequently, the system of social rural life undergoes, and will undergo, changes. The social culture of rural districts and the interhuman relations are, to some extent, a reaction to that external action coming from superior authorities. The bases, however, are provided by the total cultural heritage, which includes experiences and achievements of the traditional folk culture. Therefore, the mechanism of changes in this field is very complex. That is why the state policy moves require a theoretical consideration of development causality of social life in local rural communities.

The conclusions presented below are selected from my Doctor's thesis on Typology of Social Activity /based on analysis of local rural community/.

- In the phenomenon of social activity of present-day Polish rural areas there can be singled out three essential types of this activity resulting from three kinds of human needs namely, 1/ necessaries of life linked with performing farmer's profession and running a household, 2/ emotional ties at vital moments of man's life, in fate and family emergencies, and 3/ the need for social affirmation of one's own personality.

- The typology of forms of social activity occurring in rural areas nowadays shows, simultaneously, an evolution of the phenomenon from forms of minor social meaning and

those linked with farmer's workshop only, to multi-line forms as for their social meaning, which are linked with man's personality and the degree of its development.

- This evolution trend of the social activity phenomenon is also shown by its cybernetic, formal analysis, in the light of which forms of social activity of the third type reveal in their information systems some reserves allowing an adjustible improvement.

- The evolution of the social activity phenomenon indicates changes in the cultural value system of today's rural areas of Poland. There occurs a trend to replace, as a value, the man understood in the categories of emotion by a man in the intellectural-personality sense.

- The evolution of social activity also displays changes in the customs of Polish rural areas. The interference of the local community in different fields of life of its single members in the traditional folk culture was carried out in a direct way, while nowadays it is a more indirect influence by shaping human personalities.

- In the centre of attention of a local community there always is, ex definitione, the most essential problem of the given time. Thus, if we agree that human personality belongs under the category of life quality phenomena, we may assume that Polish rural areas have entered the development stage of shaping up life quality.

- The social activity of an individual is determined by the place occupied by this individual in the social

structure. The following criteria-factors are mainly involved: profession, education, farm size, sex, age, space, family state, social and cultural situation, status, organization membership and style of life. It should be emphasized that social activity of the third type, which is a social affirmation of one's own personality, provides a new factor of structural differentiation of rural inhabitants.

- Social activity is closely linked with the occurring modernization process of rural areas. This is shown by the share of social activity in the setting up of infrastructure, in developing the modernization programme, in gaining funds for modernization purposes, in providing the staff needed for modernization, and in forming adequate human attitudes for accepting modernization changes.

- Social activity by taking part in all three stages of introducing innovations in rural areas, that is to say, in preparing conditions in the material and awareness sphere, in accepting innovations, and in their cultural objectivization, performs the function of social control of innovations, invading rural areas so abundantly, by exercising their selection.

- Thus, social activity, to some degree and in some range, accounts for the total cultural picture of rural areas. Therefore, people who participate in social activity, and their personalities, particularly those performing guiding roles, the leaders of rural social life, are of vital importance.

- In the phenomenon of social activity there occurs a constant move of appearing and vanishing, with the rural culture, as a total system, eliminating, functionally, some forms and introducing others, in its development process. This follows a determined and changing principle, which depends on the general process characterizing the given stage of civilization development of the society. In case of present-day rural areas in Poland, this principle is reduced to human personality as the most essential category for the modernization process as well as for the phenomenon of social activity.